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DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

Rural Business - Cooperative Service

Inviting Applications for Socially-Disadvantaged Groups Grants

AGENCY: Rural Business - Cooperative Service, USDA.

ACTION: Notice.

SUMMARY: The Rural Business-Cooperative Service announces the availability of \$3,000,000 in competitive grant funds for the FY 2015 Socially-Disadvantaged Groups Grant (SDGG) program, formerly known as the Small Socially-Disadvantaged Producer Grant program, as authorized by the Consolidated and Further Continuing Appropriations Act, 2015 (Pub. L. 113-235). We are requesting proposals from applicants who will provide technical assistance to socially-disadvantaged groups in rural areas. The Agency is encouraging applications that direct grants to projects based in or serving census tracts with poverty rates greater than or equal to 20 percent. This emphasis will support Rural Development's (RD) mission of improving the quality of life for rural Americans and commitment to directing resources to those who most need them. Eligible applicants include Cooperatives, Groups of Cooperatives, and Cooperative Development Centers.

DATES: Completed applications for grants must be submitted on paper or electronically according to the following deadlines:

Paper copies must be postmarked and mailed, shipped, or sent overnight no later than [INSERT DATE 60 DAYS AFTER PUBLICATION IN THE FEDERAL REGISTER]. You may also hand carry your application to one of our field offices, but it must be received by close of business on the deadline date.

Electronic copies must be received by <http://www.grants.gov> no later than midnight Eastern time [INSERT DATE 55 DAYS AFTER PUBLICATION IN THE FEDERAL REGISTER]. Late applications are not eligible for funding under this Notice and will not be evaluated.

ADDRESSES: You should contact the USDA Rural Development State Office (State Office) located in the State where you are headquartered if you have questions. Contact information for State Offices can be found at: <http://www.rd.usda.gov/contact-us/state-offices>. You are encouraged to contact your State Office well in advance of the application deadline to discuss your project and ask any questions about the application process. Program guidance as well as application templates may be obtained at http://www.rurdev.usda.gov/BCP_SDGG.html or by contacting your USDA Rural Development State Office.

If you want to submit an electronic application, follow the instructions for the SDGG funding announcement located at <http://www.grants.gov>. Please review the Grants.gov Web site at http://grants.gov/applicants/organization_registration.jsp for instructions on the process of registering your organization as soon as possible to ensure you are able to meet the electronic application deadline. You are strongly encouraged to file your application early and allow sufficient time to manage any technical issues that may arise. If you want to submit a paper application, send it to the State Office located in the State where you are headquartered. If you are headquartered in Washington, D.C., please contact the Grants Division, Cooperative Programs, Rural Business-Cooperative Service, at (202) 690-1376 for guidance on where to submit your application.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: Grants Division, Cooperative Programs, Rural Business-Cooperative Service, United States Department of Agriculture, 1400 Independence Avenue, S.W., MS 3253, Room 4208-South, Washington, D.C. 20250-3250, or call 202-690-1376.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION:

Overview

Federal Agency Name: USDA Rural Business Cooperative Service.

Funding Opportunity Title: Socially-Disadvantaged Groups Grant.

Announcement Type: Initial funding request.

Catalog of Federal Domestic Assistance Number: 10.871.

Dates: Application Deadline. You must submit your complete application by [INSERT DATE 60 DAYS AFTER PUBLICATION IN THE FEDERAL REGISTER], or it will not be considered for funding. Electronic applications must be received by <http://www.grants.gov> no later than midnight Eastern Time [INSERT DATE 55 DAYS AFTER PUBLICATION IN THE FEDERAL REGISTER], or it will not be considered for funding.

Paperwork Reduction Act

In accordance with the Paperwork Reduction Act, the paperwork burden associated with this Notice has been approved by the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) under OMB Control Number 0570-0052.

A. Program Description

The SDGG Program is authorized by 310B (e)(11) of the Consolidated Farm and Rural Development Act (7 U.S.C. 1932 (e)(11)). The primary objective of the SDGG program is to provide Technical Assistance to Socially-Disadvantaged Groups. Grants are available for Cooperative Development Centers, individual Cooperatives, or Groups of Cooperatives that serve Socially-Disadvantaged Groups and where a majority of the boards of directors or governing board is comprised of individuals who are members of Socially-Disadvantaged Groups.

Definitions

The definitions you need to understand are as follows:

Agency -- Rural Business-Cooperative Service, an agency of the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) Rural Development or a successor agency.

Conflict of Interest -- A situation in which a person or entity has competing personal, professional, or financial interests that make it difficult for the person or business to act impartially. Federal procurement standards prohibit transactions that involve a real or apparent conflict of interest for owners, employees, officers, agents, or their immediate family members having a financial or other interest in the outcome of the project; or that restrict open and free competition for unrestrained trade. Specifically, project funds may not be used for services or goods going to, or coming from, a person or entity with a real or apparent conflict of interest, including, but not limited to, owner(s) and their immediate family members. Examples of conflicts of interest include using grant funds to pay a member of the applicant's board of directors to provide proposed technical assistance to socially-disadvantaged groups; pay a cooperative member to provide proposed technical assistance to other members of the same cooperative; and pay an immediate family member of the applicant to provide proposed technical assistance to socially-disadvantaged groups.

Cooperative -- A business or organization owned by and operated for the benefit of those using its services and where a majority of the board of directors or governing board is comprised of individuals who are members of Socially-Disadvantaged Groups. Profits and earnings generated by the cooperative are distributed among the members, also known as user-owners.

Cooperative Development Center -- A nonprofit corporation or institution of higher education operated by the grantee for cooperative or business development and where a majority of the board of directors or governing board is comprised of individuals who are members of Socially-Disadvantaged Groups. It may or may not be an independent legal entity separate from the grantee. The Center's main objective is to provide Technical Assistance to existing Cooperatives and to groups that want to form Cooperatives.

Feasibility Study -- An analysis of the economic, market, technical, financial, and management feasibility of a proposed Project.

Group of Cooperatives -- A group of Cooperatives whose primary focus is to provide assistance to Socially-Disadvantaged Groups and where a majority of the board of directors or governing board is comprised of individuals who are members of Socially-Disadvantaged Groups.

Operating Cost -- The day-to-day expenses of running a business; for example: utilities, rent on the office space a business occupies, salaries, depreciation, marketing and advertising, and other basic overhead items.

Participant Support Costs -- Direct costs for items such as stipends or subsistence allowances, travel allowances, and registration fees paid to or on behalf of participants or trainees (but not employees) in connection with conferences, or training projects.

Project -- Includes all activities to be funded by the Socially-Disadvantaged Groups Grant.

Rural and Rural Area -- Any area of a State:

- (1) Not in a city or town that has a population of more than 50,000 inhabitants, according to the latest decennial census of the United States; and
- (2) The contiguous and adjacent urbanized area,
- (3) Urbanized areas that are rural in character as defined by 7 U.S.C. 1991 (a) (13).
- (4) For the purposes of this definition, cities and towns are incorporated population centers with definite boundaries, local self-government, and legal powers set forth in a charter granted by the State. Notwithstanding any other provision of this paragraph, within the areas of the County of Honolulu, Hawaii, and the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico, the Secretary may designate any part of the areas as a rural area if the Secretary determines that the part is not urban in character, other than any area included in the Honolulu census designated place (CDP) or the San Juan CDP.

Rural Development -- A mission area within USDA consisting of the Office of Under Secretary for Rural Development, Rural Business-Cooperative Services, Rural Housing Service, and Rural Utilities Service and any successors.

Socially-Disadvantaged Group – A group whose members have been subjected to racial, ethnic, or gender prejudice because of their identity as members of a group without regard to their individual qualities.

State -- Includes each of the 50 states, the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico, the Virgin Islands of the United States, Guam, American Samoa, the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands, and, as may be determined by the Secretary to be feasible,

appropriate and lawful, the Federated States of Micronesia, the Republic of the Marshall Islands and the Republic of Palau.

Technical Assistance -- An advisory service performed for the benefit of a Socially-Disadvantaged Group such as market research, product and/or service improvement, legal advice and assistance, Feasibility Study, business plan, marketing plan development, and training.

B. Federal Award Information

Type of Award: Competitive Grant.

Fiscal Year Funds: FY 2015.

Total Funding: \$3,000,000.

Maximum Award: \$175,000.

Project Period: 1 year.

Anticipated Award Date: September 30, 2015.

C. Eligibility Information

Applicants must meet all of the following eligibility requirements. Applications which fail to meet any of these requirements by the application deadline will be deemed ineligible and will not be evaluated further.

1. Eligible Applicants. Grants may be made to individual Cooperatives, Groups of Cooperatives, and Cooperative Development Centers that serve socially disadvantaged groups and where a majority of the board of directors or governing board is comprised of individuals who are members of Socially-Disadvantaged Groups. Federally-recognized

Tribes and tribal entities must demonstrate that they meet all definition requirements for one of the three eligible applicant types. You must be able to verify your legal structure in the State in which you are incorporated. Grants may not be made to public bodies or to individuals.

(a) An applicant is ineligible if they have been debarred or suspended or otherwise excluded from or ineligible for participation in Federal assistance programs under Executive Order 12549, "Debarment and Suspension." In addition, an applicant will be considered ineligible for a grant due to an outstanding judgment obtained by the U.S. in a Federal Court (other than U.S. Tax Court), is delinquent on the payment of Federal income taxes, or is delinquent on Federal debt.

(b) Any corporation (i) that has been convicted of a felony criminal violation under any Federal law within the past 24 months or (ii) that has any unpaid Federal tax liability that has been assessed, for which all judicial and administrative remedies have been exhausted or have lapsed, and that is not being paid in a timely manner pursuant to an agreement with the authority responsible for collecting the tax liability, is not eligible for financial assistance provided with funds appropriated by the Consolidated and Further Continuing Appropriations Act, 2015, unless a Federal agency has considered suspension or debarment of the corporation and has made a determination that this further action is not necessary to protect the interests of the Government.

2. Cost Sharing or Matching. No matching funds are required.

3. Other Eligibility Requirements.

Use of Funds: Your application must propose Technical Assistance that will benefit Socially-Disadvantaged Groups. Please review section D (6) of this Notice, “Funding Restrictions,” carefully.

Project Area Eligibility: The proposed Project must take place in a Rural Area as defined in this Notice.

Grant Period Eligibility: If awarded, grant funds must be used within 12 months. Applications must have a time frame of one year or less. Your proposed time frame should begin no earlier than the grant award date and end no later than December 31, 2016. However, you should note that the anticipated award date is September 30, so your proposed start date should be after September 30, 2015. Projects must be completed within the 12-month time frame. The Agency may approve requests to extend the grant period for up to an additional 12 months at its discretion. Further guidance on grant period extensions will be provided in the award document.

However, you may not have more than one active SDGG during the same grant period. If you receive another SDGG during the next grant cycle, the first grant must be closed before funds can be obligated for the new grant. Applications that request funds for a time period ending after December 31, 2016, will not be considered for funding.

If you have an existing Small Socially-Disadvantaged Producer Grant award, you must be performing satisfactorily to be considered eligible for a new SDGG award. Satisfactory performance includes being up-to-date on all financial and performance reports and being current on all tasks as approved in the work plan. The Agency will use its discretion to make this determination.

Completeness Eligibility: Your application must provide all of the information requested in Section D (2) of this Notice. Applications lacking sufficient information to determine eligibility and scoring will be considered ineligible.

Multiple Grant Eligibility: You may only submit one SDGG grant application each funding cycle.

D. Application and Submission Information

1. Address to Request Application Package.

The application template for applying on paper for this funding opportunity is located at http://www.rurdev.usda.gov/BCP_SDGG.html. Use of the application template is strongly recommended to assist you with the application process. You may also contact your USDA Rural Development State Office for more information. Contact information for State Offices is located at <http://www.rd.usda.gov/contact-us/state-offices>. You may also obtain an application package by calling 202-690-1376.

2. Content and Form of Application Submission

You may submit your application in paper form or electronically through Grants.gov. Your application must contain all required information.

To submit an application electronically, you must follow the instructions for this funding announcement at <http://www.grants.gov>. Please note that we cannot accept emailed or faxed applications.

You can locate the Grants.gov downloadable application package for this program by using a keyword, the program name, or the Catalog of Federal Domestic Assistance Number for this program.

When you enter the Grants.gov Web site, you will find information about submitting an application electronically through the site, as well as the hours of operation.

To use Grants.gov, you must already have a DUNS number and you must also be registered and maintain registration in SAM. We strongly recommend that you do not wait until the application deadline date to begin the application process through Grants.gov.

You must submit all of your application documents electronically through Grants.gov. Applications must include electronic signatures. Original signatures may be required if funds are awarded.

After electronically submitting an application through Grants.gov, you will receive an automatic acknowledgement from Grants.gov that contains a Grants.gov tracking number.

If you want to submit a paper application, send it to the State Office located in the State where you are headquartered. You can find State Office contact information at: <http://www.rd.usda.gov/contact-us/state-offices>.

Your application must also contain the following required forms and proposal elements:

a. Form SF-424, "Application for Federal Assistance," to include your DUNS number and SAM Commercial and Government Entity (CAGE) code and expiration date. Because there are no specific fields for a CAGE code and expiration date, you may identify them anywhere you want to on the form. If you do not include the CAGE code

and expiration date and the DUNS number in your application, it will not be considered for funding.

b. Form SF-424A, “Budget Information-Non-Construction Programs.” This form must be completed and submitted as part of the application package.

c. Form SF-424B, “Assurances--Non-Construction Programs.” This form must be completed, signed, and submitted as part of the application package.

d. Form AD-3030, “Representations Regarding Felony Conviction and Tax Delinquent Status for Corporate Applicants,” if you are a corporation. A corporation is any entity that has filed articles of incorporation in one of the 50 States, the District of Columbia, the Federated States of Micronesia, the Republic of Palau, and the Republic of the Marshall Islands, or the various territories of the United States including American Samoa, Guam, Midway Islands, the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands, Puerto Rico, or the U.S. Virgin Islands. Corporations include both for profit and non-profit entities.

e. You must certify that there are no current outstanding Federal judgments against your property and that you will not use grant funds to pay for any judgment obtained by the United States. To satisfy the Certification requirement, you should include this statement in your application: “[INSERT NAME OF APPLICANT] certifies that the United States has not obtained an unsatisfied judgment against its property and will not use grant funds to pay any judgments obtained by the United States.” A separate signature is not required.

f. Table of Contents. Your application must contain a detailed Table of Contents (TOC). The TOC must include page numbers for each part of the application. Page numbers should begin immediately following the TOC.

g. Executive Summary. A summary of the proposal, not to exceed one page, must briefly describe the Project, tasks to be completed, and other relevant information that provides a general overview of the Project.

h. Eligibility Discussion. A detailed discussion, not to exceed four pages, must describe how you meet the following requirements:

(i) Applicant Eligibility. You must describe how you meet the definition of a Cooperative, Group of Cooperatives, or Cooperative Development Center. Your application must show that your individual Cooperative, Group of Cooperatives or Cooperative Development Center serves socially disadvantaged groups and a majority of the board of directors or governing board is comprised of individuals who are members of Socially-Disadvantaged Groups. Your application must include a list of your board of directors/governing board and the percentage of board of directors/governing board that are members of Socially-Disadvantaged Groups. NOTE: Your application will not be considered for funding if you fail to show that a majority of your board of directors/governing board is comprised of individuals who are members of Socially-Disadvantaged Groups.

If applying as a Cooperative or a Group of Cooperatives, you must verify your incorporation and status in the State that you have applied by providing the State's Certificate of Good Standing and your Articles of Incorporation. If applying as a nonprofit corporation, you must provide evidence of your status as a nonprofit

corporation in good standing and your Articles of Incorporation. If applying as an institution of higher education, you must qualify as an Institution of Higher Education as defined at 20 U.S.C. 1001. You must apply as only one type of applicant. If the requested verification documents are not included, your application will not be considered for funding.

(ii) Use of Funds. You must provide a detailed discussion on how the proposed Project activities meet the definition of Technical Assistance and identify the socially-disadvantaged groups that will be assisted.

(iii) Project Area. You must provide specific information that details the location of the Project area and explain how the area meets the definition of “Rural Area.”

(iv) Grant Period. You must provide a time frame for the proposed Project and discuss how the Project will be completed within that time frame. You must have a time frame of one year or less.

i. Scoring Criteria. Each of the scoring criteria in this Notice must be addressed in narrative form, with a maximum of two pages for each individual scoring criterion, unless otherwise specified. Failure to address each scoring criteria will result in the application being determined ineligible.

j. The Agency has established annual performance evaluation measures to evaluate the SDGG program. You must provide estimates on the following performance evaluation measures as part of your narrative:

- Number of businesses assisted;
- Number of cooperatives assisted; and
- Number of socially disadvantaged groups assisted.

3. DUNS Number and SAM

In order to be eligible (unless you are excepted under 2 CFR 25.110(b), (c) or (d), you are required to:

(a) Provide a valid DUNS number in your application, which can be obtained at no cost via a toll-free request line at (866) 705-5711;

(b) Register in SAM before submitting your application. You may register in SAM at no cost at <https://www.sam.gov/portal/public/SAM/>; and

(c) Continue to maintain an active SAM registration with current information at all times during which you have an active Federal award or an application or plan under consideration by a Federal awarding agency.

The Agency may not make a Federal award to you until you have complied with all applicable DUNS and SAM requirements. If you have not fully complied with requirements by the time the Agency is ready to make a Federal award, the Agency may determine that the applicant is not qualified to receive a Federal award and the Agency may use this determination as a basis for making an award to another applicant.

4. Submission Dates and Times.

Application Deadline Date: [INSERT DATE 60 DAYS AFTER PUBLICATION IN THE FEDERAL REGISTER].

Explanation of Deadlines: Paper applications must be postmarked and mailed, shipped, or sent overnight by [INSERT DATE 60 DAYS AFTER PUBLICATION IN THE FEDERAL REGISTER]. The Agency will determine whether your application is

late based on the date shown on the postmark or shipping invoice. You may also hand carry your application to one of our field offices, but it must be received by close of business on the deadline date. If the due date falls on a Saturday, Sunday, or Federal holiday, the reporting package is due the next business day. Late applications are not eligible for funding and will not be evaluated further.

Electronic applications must be RECEIVED by <http://www.grants.gov> by midnight Eastern time [INSERT DATE 55 DAYS AFTER PUBLICATION IN THE FEDERAL REGISTER], to be eligible for funding. Please review the Grants.gov website at http://grants.gov/applicants/organization_registration.jsp for instructions on the process of registering your organization as soon as possible to ensure you are able to meet the electronic application deadline. Grants.gov will not accept applications submitted after the deadline.

5. Intergovernmental Review.

Executive Order (EO) 12372, Intergovernmental Review of Federal Programs, applies to this program. This EO requires that Federal agencies provide opportunities for consultation on proposed assistance with State and local governments. Many States have established a Single Point of Contact (SPOC) to facilitate this consultation. A list of States that maintain a SPOC may be obtained at http://www.whitehouse.gov/omb/grants_spoc. If your State has a SPOC, you may submit your application directly for review. Any comments obtained through the SPOC must be provided to Rural Development for consideration as part of your application. If your State has not established a SPOC or you do not want to submit your application to the

SPOC, Rural Development will submit your application to the SPOC or other appropriate agency or agencies.

You are also encouraged to contact Cooperative Programs at 202-690-1376 or cpgrants@wdc.usda.gov if you have questions about this process.

6. Funding Restrictions.

Grant funds must be used for Technical Assistance. No funds made available under this solicitation shall be used to:

- a. Plan, repair, rehabilitate, acquire, or construct a building or facility, including a processing facility;
- b. Purchase, rent, or install fixed equipment, including processing equipment;
- c. Purchase vehicles, including boats;
- d. Pay for the preparation of the grant application;
- e. Pay expenses not directly related to the funded Project;
- f. Fund political or lobbying activities;
- g. To fund any activities considered unallowable by the applicable grant cost principles, including 2 CFR Part 200, Subpart E and the Federal Acquisition Regulation.
- h. Fund architectural or engineering design work for a specific physical facility;
- i. Fund any direct expenses for the production of any commodity or product to which value will be added, including seed, rootstock, labor for harvesting the crop, and delivery of the commodity to a processing facility;
- j. Fund research and development;
- k. Purchase land;

l. Duplicate current activities or activities paid for by other funded grant programs.

m. Pay costs of the Project incurred prior to the date of grant approval;

n. Pay for assistance to any private business enterprise that does not have at least 51 percent ownership by those who are either citizens of the United States or reside in the United States after being legally admitted for permanent residence;

o. Pay any judgment or debt owed to the United States;

p. Pay any Operating Costs of the Cooperative, Group of Cooperatives, or Cooperative Development Center not directly related to the Project;

q. Pay expenses for applicant employee training; or

r. Pay for any goods or services from a person who has a Conflict of Interest with the grantee.

In addition, your application will not be considered for funding if it does any of the following:

- Requests more than the maximum grant amount;
- Proposes ineligible costs that equal more than 10 percent of total grant funds requested; or
- Proposes Participant Support Costs that equal more than 10 percent of total grant funds requested.

We will consider your application for funding if it includes ineligible costs of 10 percent or less of total grant funds requested, as long as it is determined eligible otherwise. However, if your application is successful, those ineligible costs must be removed and replaced with eligible costs before the Agency will make the grant award or the amount of the grant award will be reduced accordingly. If we cannot determine the percentage of ineligible costs, your application will not be considered for funding.

7. Other Submission Requirements

(a) You should not submit your application in more than one format. You must choose whether to submit your application in hard copy or electronically. Applications submitted in hard copy should be mailed or hand-delivered to the State Office located in the State where you are headquartered. You can find State Office contact information at: <http://www.rd.usda.gov/contact-us/state-offices>.your State Office. To submit an application electronically, you must follow the instructions for this funding announcement at <http://www.grants.gov>. A password is not required to access the website.

(b) National Environmental Policy Act. This NOFA has been reviewed in accordance with 7 CFR part 1940, subpart G, "Environmental Program." We have determined that an Environmental Impact Statement is not required because the issuance of regulations and instructions, as well as amendments to them, describing administrative and financial procedures for processing, approving, and implementing the Agency's financial programs is categorically excluded in the Agency's National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA)

regulation found at 7 CFR 1940.310(e)(3) of subpart G, “Environmental Program.” We have determined that this NOFA does not constitute a major Federal action significantly affecting the quality of the human environment. Individual awards under this NOFA are hereby classified as Categorical Exclusions according to 7 CFR 1940.310(e), the award of financial assistance for planning purposes, management and feasibility studies, or environmental impact analyses, which do not require any additional documentation.

(c) Civil Rights Compliance Requirements. All grants made under this Notice are subject to Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 as required by the USDA (7 CFR part 15, subpart A) and Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973.

E. Application Review Information

1. Scoring Criteria.

All eligible and complete applications will be evaluated based on the following criteria. Failure to address any one of the following criteria by the application deadline will result in the application being determined ineligible and the application will not be considered for funding. Evaluators will base scores only on the information provided or cross-referenced by page number in each individual scoring criterion. The total points possible for the criteria are 60.

I. Technical Assistance (maximum score of 15 points). A panel of USDA employees will evaluate your application to determine your ability to assess the needs of Socially-Disadvantaged Groups. You must explain why the proposed Technical Assistance is needed and provide a detailed plan that describes your method of providing

assistance. You must also identify the expected outcomes of the proposed Technical Assistance.

Higher points are awarded if you identify specific needs of the Socially-Disadvantaged Groups to be assisted; clearly explain a logical and detailed plan of assistance for addressing those needs; and discuss realistic outcomes of planned assistance.

II. Experience (maximum score of 15 points). A panel of USDA employees will evaluate your length of experience for identified staff or consultants in providing Technical Assistance, as defined in this Notice. You must describe the specific type of Technical Assistance experience for each identified staff member or consultant, as well as years of experience in providing that assistance. In addition, resumes for each individual staff member or consultant must be included as an attachment, listing their experience for the type of Technical Assistance proposed. The attachments will not count toward the maximum page total. We will compare the described experience to the work plan to determine relevance of the experience. Applications that do not include the attached resumes will not be considered for funding.

Higher points will be awarded if a **majority** of identified staff or consultants demonstrate 5 or more years of experience in providing relevant Technical Assistance in accordance with the work plan. Maximum points will be awarded if **all** of the identified staff or consultants demonstrate 5 or more years of experience in providing relevant Technical Assistance.

III. Commitment (maximum of 10 points). A panel of USDA employees will evaluate your commitment to providing Technical Assistance to Socially-Disadvantaged Groups in Rural Areas. You must list the number and location of Socially-Disadvantaged Groups that will directly benefit from the assistance provided. If you define and describe the underserved and economically distressed areas within your service area and provide current and relevant statistics that support your description of the service area, you will score higher on this factor.

IV. Work Plan /Budget (maximum of 15 points) – Four page limit. Your work plan must provide specific and detailed descriptions of the tasks and the key project personnel that will accomplish the project's goals. Budget will be reviewed for completeness. You must list what tasks are to be done, when it will be done, who will do it, and how much it will cost. Reviewers must be able to understand what is being proposed and how the grant funds will be spent. The budget must be a detailed breakdown of estimated costs. These costs should be allocated to each of the tasks to be undertaken. The amount of grant funds requested will be reduced if the applicant does not have justification for all costs.

A panel of USDA employees will evaluate your work plan for detailed actions and an accompanying timetable for implementing the proposal. Clear, logical, realistic, and efficient plans will result in a higher score. You must discuss at a minimum:

- a. Specific tasks to be completed using grant funds;
- b. How customers will be identified;
- c. Key personnel; and

d. The evaluation methods to be used to determine the success of specific tasks and overall project objectives. Please provide qualitative methods of evaluation. For example, evaluation methods should go beyond quantitative measurements of completing surveys or number of evaluations.

V. Local support (maximum of 5 points). A panel of USDA employees will evaluate your application for local support of the Technical Assistance activities. Applicants that demonstrate strong support from potential beneficiaries and other developmental organizations will receive more points than those not showing such support.

(i) 0 points are awarded if you do not address this criterion.

(ii) 1 point is awarded if you provide 2-3 support letters that show support from potential beneficiaries and/or support from local organizations.

(iii) 2 points are awarded if you provide 4 -5 support letters that show support from potential beneficiaries and/or support from local organizations.

(iv) 3 points are awarded if you provide 6-7 support letters that show support from potential beneficiaries and/or support from local organizations.

(v) 4 points are awarded if you provide 8-9 support letters that show support from potential beneficiaries and/or support from local organizations.

(vi) 5 points are awarded if you provide 10 support letters that show support from potential beneficiaries and/or support from local organizations.

You may submit a maximum of 10 letters of support. Support letters should come from potential beneficiaries and other local organizations. Letters received from

Technical Assistance providers and Congressional members will not be included in the count of support letters received. Support letters should be included as an attachment to the application and will not count against the maximum page total. Additional letters from industry groups, commodity groups, Congressional members, and similar organizations should be referenced, but not included in the application package. When referencing these letters, provide the name of the organization, date of the letter, the nature of the support, and the name and title of the person signing the letter.

2. Review and Selection Process.

The State Offices will review applications to determine if they are eligible for assistance based on requirements in this Notice, and other applicable Federal regulations. If determined eligible, your application will be scored by a panel of USDA employees in accordance with the point allocation specified in this Notice. The panel will consist of USDA employees with expertise in providing Technical Assistance to Socially-Disadvantaged Groups. The review panel will convene to reach a consensus on the scores for each of the eligible applications. A recommendation will be submitted to the Administrator to fund applications in highest ranking order. Applications that cannot be fully funded may be offered partial funding at the Agency's discretion. If your application is ranked and not funded, it will not be carried forward into the next competition.

F. Federal Award Administration Information

1. Federal Award Notices.

If you are selected for funding, you will receive a signed notice of Federal award by postal mail, containing instructions on requirements necessary to proceed with execution and performance of the award.

If you are not selected for funding, you will be notified in writing via postal mail and informed of any review and appeal rights. Funding of successfully appealed applications will be limited to available FY 2015 funding.

2. Administrative and National Policy Requirements.

Additional requirements that apply to grantees selected for this program can be found in 7 CFR part 4284, subpart A, and 2 CFR parts 200, 215, 400, 415, 417, 418, and 421. All recipients of Federal financial assistance are required to report information about first-tier subawards and executive compensation (See 2 CFR part 170). You will be required to have the necessary processes and systems in place to comply with the Federal Funding Accountability and Transparency Act reporting requirements (See 2 CFR 170.200(b), unless you are exempt under 2 CFR 170.110(b)). These regulations may be obtained at <http://www.gpoaccess.gov/cfr/index.html>.

The following additional requirements apply to grantees selected for this program:

- Agency approved Grant Agreement.
- Letter of Conditions.
- Form RD 1940-1, "Request for Obligation of Funds."

- Form RD 1942-46, “Letter of Intent to Meet Conditions.”
- Form AD-1047, “Certification Regarding Debarment, Suspension, and Other Responsibility Matters-Primary Covered Transactions.”
- Form AD-1048, “Certification Regarding Debarment, Suspension, Ineligibility and Voluntary Exclusion-Lower Tier Covered Transactions.”
- Form AD-1049, “Certification Regarding a Drug-Free Workplace Requirement (Grants).”
- Form AD-3031, “Assurance Regarding Felony Conviction or Tax Delinquent Status for Corporate Applicants.” Must be signed by corporate applicants who receive an award under this Notice.
- Form RD 400-4, “Assurance Agreement.”
- SF LLL, "Disclosure of Lobbying Activities," if applicable.

3. Reporting

After grant approval and through grant completion, you will be required to provide the following:

- a. A SF-425, “Federal Financial Report,” and a project performance report will be required on a semiannual basis (due 30 working days after end of the semiannual period). For the purposes of this grant, semiannual periods end on March 31st and September 30th. The project performance reports shall include the following: A comparison of actual accomplishments to the objectives established for that period;
- b. Reasons why established objectives were not met, if applicable;

- c. Reasons for any problems, delays, or adverse conditions, if any, which have affected or will affect attainment of overall project objectives, prevent meeting time schedules or objectives, or preclude the attainment of particular objectives during established time periods. This disclosure shall be accompanied by a statement of the action taken or planned to resolve the situation; and
- d. Objectives and timetable established for the next reporting period.
- e. Provide a final project and financial status report within 90 days after the expiration or termination of the grant.
- f. Provide outcome project performance reports and final deliverables.

G. Agency Contacts

For general questions about this announcement and for program Technical Assistance, please contact the appropriate State Office as indicated in the **ADDRESSES** section of this Notice. You may also contact National Office staff: Melinda Martin, SDGG Program Lead, Melinda.C.Martin@wdc.usda.gov, or call 202-690-1376.

H. Other Information

Non Discrimination Statement

USDA prohibits discrimination against its customers, employees, and applicants for employment on the bases of race, color, national origin, age, disability, sex, gender identify, religion, reprisal, and where applicable, political beliefs, marital status, familial or parental status, sexual orientation, or all or part of an individual's income is derived from any public assistance program, or protected genetic information in employment or

in any program or activity conducted or funded by the Department. (Not all prohibited bases will apply to all programs and/or employment activities.)

To File a Program Complaint

If you wish to file a Civil Rights program complaint of discrimination, complete the USDA Program Discrimination Complaint Form (PDF), found online at http://www.ascr.usda.gov/complain_filing_cust.html , or at any USDA office, or call (866) 632-9992 to request the form. You may also write a letter containing all of the information requested in the form. Send your completed complaint form or letter to us by mail at U.S. Department of Agriculture, Director, Office of Adjudication, 1400 Independence Avenue, S.W., Washington, D.C. 20250-9410, by fax (202) 690-7442 or email at program.intake@usda.gov.

Persons with Disabilities

Individuals who are deaf, hard of hearing or have speech disabilities and who wish to file either an EEO or program complaint, please contact USDA through the Federal Relay Service at (800) 877-8339 or (800) 845-6136 (in Spanish).

Persons with disabilities, who wish to file a program complaint, please see information above on how to contact us by mail directly or by email. If you require alternative means of communication for program information (e.g., Braille, large print, audiotape, etc.), please contact USDA's TARGET Center at (202) 720-2600 (voice and TDD).

LILLIAN SALERNO ,
Administrator,
Rural Business-Cooperative Service.

May 14, 2015
DATE

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